



Education Watch

Enhancing Flexibility & Accountability ■ Leaving No Child Behind

U.S. House Education & the Workforce Committee ■ John Boehner, Chairman
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Paige Stresses IDEA Reforms at Learning Disabilities Event

Education Secretary Rod Paige today addressed the importance of early and **accurate** identification of learning disabilities at the Learning Disabilities Summit held in Washington D.C. "We should measure success not by how many children we identify [as learning disabled], but by how much they -- and all children -- learn. All parents have the right to expect high standards in education for their children. We can accept no less," Paige said.

Why is this critically important? Due to flaws in IDEA's current structure, minority children are over-identified for special education services. Some children are being diagnosed as needing IDEA services simply because they did not receive proper early reading instruction.

Earlier this year, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard released a series of reports, one finding that African American children are almost three times as likely as white children to be labeled mentally retarded and placed in special education. Another report found that African American students might be receiving poorer educational services than white students with disabilities.

The President's initiatives emphasize scientifically based instruction to ensure that children in Head Start and other pre-school programs learn vital pre-reading skills before entering grade school. These programs will help prevent minority children from being mislabeled as needing special education.

Before Congress mandates full funding of IDEA, as some propose doing as part of this year's K-12 education reform effort, it must first answer the question of why there is such an over-representation of minority students in the special education system in order to remedy the problem.

Message of the Day

President Bush's early reading initiatives will help disadvantaged children from falling behind.

- ❑ *IDEA is over-identifying minority children as disabled; it needs systemic reform before Congress can fully fund it.*
- ❑ *The Bush Reading First initiative triples funding for scientifically based programs. Ensuring that more children receive effective instruction means that more children will receive the help they need.*
- ❑ *It also reduces the cost burden on all levels of government as fewer children are diagnosed as needing IDEA services simply because they did not receive proper reading instruction during the early years.*

DAILY EDUCATION FACTS

- A recent University of Michigan study found that more than 20 percent of U.S. first-graders have severe reading difficulties. Of those children, nearly 3 in 4 are likely to remain poor readers. More than 10 million American children have trouble reading, the study found. (Laurence McQuillan, *USA Today*, July 26, 2001)
- Under H.R. 1, states participating in the Reading First program will have the option to receive "Early Reading First" funding to implement proven, research-based reading programs in Head Start and existing pre-school programs.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Our special education system has a big problem with the over-enrollment of minority students. Putting kids into special education simply because they can't read not only prevents them from reaching their full potential, it also robs children with real learning and physical disabilities of the federal dollars intended for them." **Education Secretary Rod Paige, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 1, 2001**